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Employee's Cynicism in Organization: A Look at Malaysian Higher Education Institution

Nor Azila Mohd Noor

**Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business
University Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia
azila@uum.edu.my**

Zamzam Mohd Walid

**Ministry of Higher Education, Putra Jaya, Malaysia
zamzam@mohe.gov.my**

Corresponding author: azila@uum.edu.my

Abstract

Unlike the past few decades, the higher education environment nowadays has been experiencing tremendous transformations and changes. As a result, higher education institutions have to prepare planned changes to cope with the shifting educational environment. However, higher education institutions are guided by traditional academic values, such as "intellectual creativity," "academic freedom," and "shared governance," more than just by the "bottom-line performance" in corporate organizations. When any change efforts interrupt the deep-rooted academic culture, academicians tend to respond with cynicism. Employee's cynicism towards organizational change or known as change-specific cynicism refers to the tendency of employees to be cynical about any changes introduced by their respective organizations. This study examines the level of employees' cynicism when dealing with organizational change in higher organizational setting. A total of 263 lecturers have been chosen as sample in this study. The study shows that the level of change specific cynicism among respondents are at moderate level. Analysis undertaken shows that change specific cynicism tends to be differ across age and academic qualification. Theoretical and practical implications of the study are discussed.

Keyword: Change Specific Cynicism, Cynicism, Higher Academic Institution, Organization.

1. Introduction

Undeniably, in order to survive in the dynamic work environment, organization has to confront with various economic, technological and social environment changes. As cited in Armenakis and Harris [6], in most circumstances management would expects that the employees are always ready to face with the challenges. However, changes are often faced with resistance [22, 35]. There are many sources of potential reasons of resistance, but of concern recently is employee's cynicism towards organizational change [1, 32, 38, 37]. Various studies have shown that changes in the organization will result in cynicism [7, 11]. As discussed by Wanous et al. [37], employees tend to be cynical about continuous changes in the organization. They also stated that cynicism can act as a barrier of efforts to change [37]. This point becomes even more important when a change is likely to occur as a result of economic and political uncertainty [30]. Nevertheless, study that focused on employees cynicism towards organizational change is still limited [30, 33] and previous studies have mostly conducted in the field of management and psychology [1, 5, 4, 11, 19, 34, 37,

35]. This is because cynicism is usually seen as a negative attitude among workers that can damage the organization [17]. Until now, most studies related to cynicism conducted in western countries tend to focus on cynicism in general [32, 37]. Only a few studies focused on employees' cynicism due to a specific change, better known as change-specific cynicism [1, 4, 30, 34]. Despite the importance of change-specific cynicism, research conducted in the area is still limited [30]. Apart from the business and other service sectors, the education sector particularly higher education institutions are also undergoing rapid changes [24]. These changes also trigger cynicism [25, 31, 38] especially among academic staff [30].

2. Literature Review

According to Andersson [5] and Kanter and Mirvis [19], cynicism in the workplace occurs whenever an individual has no faith in the leader or head of the organization and believe that if given the opportunity, the management will exploit the employees. Cynicism can easily spread in organizations [30]. According to Goldfarb and Eisinger [16, 14], cynicism dominates the assumptions of political and cultural life and " [it] ... is a component of the social structure.

Researchers such as Kanter and Mirvis [19, 20] also observe the specific construct and its relationship with other organizational problems. Stanley et al. [34] and Ajzen and Fishbein [3] noted that the organizational change cynicism is too general and does not affect the employee cynicism to a specific organizational change. Stanley et al. [34], define change specific cynicism as a disbelief of management's stated or implied motives for a specific organizational change, while Qian and Daniels [30] define change specific cynicism as a negative attitude toward a specific organizational change. Based on the definitions given by Andersson [5], Andersson and Bateman [4], Dean et al. [11], Qian and Daniels [30], Stanley et al. [34] and Wanous et al. [37], the current study defines change specific cynicism adopted from Qian and Daniels [30]. They refer change specific cynicism as negative attitudes towards organizational change, which encompasses of three dimensions, that is mistrust any organizational change statement or motive made by the management; feelings of pessimism and hopelessness of the effort to change set off by the management, and tends to criticize any specific change initiated by the management.

3. Methodology

Unit of analysis of this study is the individual academic teaching staff who serves as full-time teaching staff at various universities in Malaysia. For the purpose of this study, a scale adopted from Dean et al. [11], Qian and Daniel [30] and Stanley et al. [34, 21] consisting of 13 items was used to measure change specific cynicism. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents in various universities in Peninsular Malaysia. Of the 500 questionnaires distributed, 318 responses were returned for a response rate of 66%. Of these returns, only 263 completed questionnaires were usable for the analyses.

4. Analysis

Table 1 shows the results of factor analysis, mean and standard deviation of change specific cynicism among respondents. It shows the mean scores of 3.32 on a five-points likert scale. This means that change specific cynicism among respondents is at a moderate level. With the standard deviation of 0.96, it suggests that change specific cynicism variation among respondents was high.

Table 1: Factor Analysis Result

Item (sample)		Factor loading
It is	I believe that the management's intentions in introducing this change are very different than they are telling employees.	.88
	I believe that the management has a "hidden agenda" in promoting this change	.86
	The management is trying to hide the reason for this change	.83
	I question the management's motives for this change	.82
	The management has been honest in conveying the reasons for this change	.81
	The management has been honest in stating its objectives for this change	.77
	Eigenvalue	4.12
	of variance	68.69
also	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	.91
	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measures of Sampling Adequacy	.86
	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity : Approx Chi-Square	1053.11
	df	5
	Sig	.00
	Mean value	3.32
	Standard deviation	.96

interesting to explore if change specific cynicism differs across profile of the respondents. *Independent t-test* is used to evaluate the differences in the level of change specific cynicism in terms of gender. A summary test of the differences is tabulated in Table 2. There was no statistical significant difference in the mean scores of change specific cynicism between males and females.

Table 2: Change Specific Cynicism By Gender

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>F-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Male	3.36	1.04	2.41	.59
Female	3.30	.91		

Note: * $p < .05$

The differences in the level of change specific cynicism among respondents were explored in terms of age and academic qualification. *Analysis of variance (ANOVA)* is used to test the differences between these variables. Table 3 summarizes the results of the test. It was found that the level of change specific cynicism among the respondents vary by age ($F = 20.70$; $p = .00$) and academic qualification ($F = 3.93$; $p = .02$). By age, post-hoc analysis showed that respondents at the age of 35 years and below are more cynical compared with those at the other age categories. Post-hoc analysis also revealed that respondents who obtained diploma as the highest academic achievement are more cynical than the other academic qualifications.

Table 3: Change Specific Cynicism By Age And Academic Qualification

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F-value (p value)</i>
Age	35 years old and below	3.81	20.70 (.00)**
	36 – 40 years old	3.21	
	Above 41 years old	2.86	
Academic qualification	Diploma	3.85	3.93 (.02)*
	Degree	3.21	
	Master & Ph.D	3.34	

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; $N=263$

5. Discussion

This study demonstrated that the level of change specific cynicism among academic staff in Malaysian higher education institutions is at moderate level. This is in line with the definition of change specific cynicism, where it can be interpreted that, in confronting with the challenges in the organizational change, academic staff tend to be moderately cynical with the changes encountered. The tendency to behave in such a way is because they do not want to be too much reliance on the success of the changes implemented. Scepticism exists because they were not given ample space to express their views and feedback on the implementation of the changes. This is consistent with findings by Bedeian [9], Dent and Goldberg [13], Morris et al. [27], Reichers et al. [32], and Parson and Tompkins [28] who generally found that in most circumstances, any changes initiated by the organizations may creates cynicism. The findings of this study revealed that the level of change specific cynicism of the academic staff does not differ across gender. This is probably due to the dominance of women in the education system in Malaysia. The study sample consists of 62 percent female. The majority of these can lead to statistical invariance which may explain why change specific cynicism did not differ by gender. In fact, both sexes showed the average level of change specific cynicism. This supports previous research by Bedeian [19], Del Val and Fuentes [12], Coch and French [10], Agocs [2], and Thompson et al. [36]. But it is contrary to the findings of Kanter and Mirvis [19] and Jennifer et

al. [18], which states that men are more cynical than females. In politics, men are also found to be more cynical than females [15]. This study also found that the level of change specific cynicism among the academic staff varies across age. Employees at the ages of below 35 have the highest change specific cynicism level compared with the other age categories. This is probably related to the psychological level respectively. At this age, employees usually expect more encouragement and observations from the management because they often fail to control their emotions well. Thus, organizational changes introduced by the management may create cynicism among them. The findings are in line with the findings of Bedeian [9] and Lewin [23] who showed that age differences have an impact on the level of employee cynicism. However, it is contrary to the findings of Maurer [26], Piderit [29], Bedeian [9] who discovered that there is no significant correlation between age difference and the level of cynicism among employees in the organization. The level of change specific cynicism among the academic staff also differs across academic qualification. The study found that people with diploma as their highest academic achievement are more cynical than those with degree and master/Ph.D. This may be explained by looking at the aspect of income compensation. Income for workers holding diploma are the lowest compared with the other groups. High financial needs which are not commensurate with the income allow them to be more cynical with the changes introduced by the management. This finding is consistent with the findings of Rubin [33] which states that educational attainment affects the level of employee cynicism. However, it is not in line with the findings of Bedeian [9] and Wanous [37] who found no correlation between academic achievement and level of cynicism among employees.

6. References

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